

“DO NOT LECTURE THE BRETHREN”: STEWART L. UDALL’S PRO-CIVIL RIGHTS STANCE, 1967

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ON 16 MAY 1967, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall sent a letter to David O. McKay, ninety-three-year-old president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This letter included an enclosure: another letter that had been accepted for publication by *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Udall’s letter to *Dialogue* included a request that the LDS Church examine and then change its century-old policy of restricting priesthood participation by blacks.

Udall, a native of Arizona and a descendent of prominent Mormon pioneers, knew his letter would create controversy. That is why he simultaneously released a copy to the press. His words were forceful and clear: “The restriction now imposed on Negro fellowship is a social and institutional practice having no real sanction in essential Mormon thought. It is clearly contradictory to our most cherished spiritual and moral ideals.”¹

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¹Stewart L. Udall, Letter to the editor, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2 (Summer 1967): 5-7.

Fortunately, for Udall and the Church, Church President Spencer W. Kimball eleven years later announced a revelation that eliminated racial barriers to priesthood participation. The experience that led to the revelation was described by Elder Bruce R. McConkie as "something akin to what happened on the day of Pentecost and at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple."² It is likely that the reaction to and impact of Udall's letter is one of many events that led to the 1978 revelation which changed the policy.

Stewart Udall's entrance into the discussion relative to the LDS Church and its policy of priesthood exclusion came from a traditional background in the LDS Church. The grandson of David K. Udall, the long-time stake president and patriarch in eastern Arizona, and the son of Levi S. Udall, who succeeded his father as stake president and later became a justice of the Arizona Supreme Court, Stewart Udall knew Mormonism well. His mother, Louise Lee Udall, was the granddaughter of John D. Lee, so Udall also knew turmoil within the faithful.

As a high-ranking government official, Udall realized that one letter could make a difference and reached the decision to go public with his views after twenty years of inner turmoil about the Church's racial position and his own personal convictions. When Udall returned to the University of Arizona law school in 1945, age twenty-five, after an LDS mission to the Eastern States and a lengthy stint on a bomber in the World War II European theater, he not only possessed political ambition but a new social conscience. He quickly became a force in Tucson's Democratic party. He married Erma Lee Webb, a native of Mesa; by the time he served in the Cabinet, their six children had been born.

However, Udall privately expressed concern over the political and economic conservatism that seemingly dominated post-war Mormon leadership. His World War II experiences pointed him in the direction of social activism. During the war, he had joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1947, the year he finished law school and married, he wrote a note to himself on why he found it difficult to be in full fellowship within the Mormon Church. One reason was: "Fellowship is made difficult because too many members find it easy to be simultaneously devout Mormons and devout anti-Semites, lover of their fellow men in public and Negrophobes in private."³ His Institute of Religion instructor

²Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike unto God," [no editor], *Charge to Religious Educators* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 153.

³Stewart L. Udall, "I feel to state some of the reasons why I cannot be a practicing Mormon in full fellowship," 1947, typescript, Box 209, fd. 3, Stewart L.

at the university was Sterling McMurrin; joined by Boyer Jarvis, the three discussed the Church's official position on numerous occasions.

Three years later in 1951, Udall helped found the Tucson League for Civil Unity with an announced goal of overturning Arizona's numerous segregation and discrimination laws aimed at Native Americans, Hispanics, and blacks. During the 1950s, his father also struck a blow for civil rights by ruling that Native Americans could not be excluded from voting. When Stewart Udall successfully won a seat in Congress in 1954, he championed the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In his three terms in Congress, Udall voted for both the 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights bills and continued to follow and encourage the developing national civil rights movement.

When John F. Kennedy rewarded Udall for delivering the Arizona delegation at the 1960 Democratic Convention by appointing the forty-year-old Congressman as Secretary of Interior, no one anticipated that one of his first acts would concern civil rights. By 1961, Washington, D.C., had become a primarily black city. The federal government had just completed the construction of a new public athletic facility, the District of Columbia Stadium. In April, Udall requested that Interior Department Solicitor Frank J. Barry render an opinion on discrimination at any facilities administered by the Department of the Interior. Using court cases, executive order, civil rights laws, and the Fourteenth Amendment, Barry informed Udall that he could simply announce that there could be no discrimination at any federal properties, including the new stadium. The Washington Redskins of the National Football League planned to share the new stadium with baseball's Senators; however the Senators moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and became the Twins. In 1961 the Redskins were the only NFL team without even one black player and had nowhere to play if Udall denied them access to the new stadium. The city received an expansion baseball team, also called the Senators, but it had black athletes.

Consequently, Udall announced that the Redskins could not use the facility because of "discriminatory hiring practices." Throughout the summer of 1961, Udall and George Preston Marshall, the Redskins's owner, battled over whether Udall had the authority to deny them use of the stadium. The Secretary of Interior finally negotiated a compromise in which Udall lifted the ban for the 1961 season conditional on Marshall's promise to draft or employ black players by 1962. Marshall tried to persuade Presi-

Udall Collection, University of Arizona Archives, Tucson, Arizona; hereafter cited as Udall Collection.

dent Kennedy's father to intervene, but the President supported Udall, even though local press coverage was primarily negative.⁴

One result of Udall's activities in behalf of blacks was a barrage of negative mail, some of which reflected on Udall's Church's policy regarding the priesthood. Whether he liked it or not, Udall replaced Ezra Taft Benson as the Mormon cabinet member. Benson's dual positions as both Mormon apostle and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture automatically made him a Church spokesman. Udall never sought Church status, but the press assumed he occupied such a position. Many black organizations praised Udall for his actions but asked him specifically when his own church might change. C. Sumner Stone, the editor of the *Washington Afro-American*, wrote to Udall, "We don't believe that a man's religion undermines to any appreciable extent his feeling toward Negroes, but it is generally believed in America that Mormons are anti-Negro."⁵ Stone enclosed a letter he had received. It read in part: "Although Udall bragged about how much he hated discrimination, Mr. Udall is said to be a Mormon, holding a profound antipathy toward our Colored Race."⁶ Udall also received a letter on church letterhead from Valdosta, Georgia, in which the author admonished him: "Now as a member of the most segregated organization on earth, how can you tell a man who to hire on a ball club?"⁷ In short, although he received some support, it seemed that Udall had offended nearly everyone, but he never expressed regret at his decision.

In his stand, he was fully in harmony with the most important issue of the day. Nineteen-sixty-one was the year of freedom rides, sit-ins, and more civil rights demonstrations. The Kennedy administration, although cautious, sent federal marshals to protect freedom riders, assigned marshals to escort college students who had won the right to attend major Southern universities, and submitted a major new civil rights bill to Congress. All of these developments prompted Udall to write to LDS First Presidency counselors Henry D. Moyle and Hugh B. Brown on 18 September 1961: "I am

⁴Numerous articles on the Udall v. Washington Redskin controversy are available. Box 63, fd. 8 in the Udall Collection contains the original letters as well as the newspaper articles. At that point, the racism inherent in the name of "Redskins," currently a controversy in Utah, was far below the threshold of consciousness.

⁵C. Sumner Stone, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 12 September 1961, Box 63 fd. 8, Udall Collection.

⁶Bernard J. McDonald, Letter to Editor, *Washington Afro-American*, 11 September 1961, Box 63, fd. 8.

⁷William D. Wildes, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 28 March 1961. Box 63, fd. 8, Udall Collection.

deeply concerned over the growing criticism of our church with regard to the issues of racial equality and the rights of minority groups." After citing repeated inquiries and comments by "leaders who occupy positions of prominence" to characterize civil rights as a topic that was not going to disappear, he maintained: "It is my judgement that unless something is done to clarify the official position of the church these sentiments will become the subject of widespread public comment and controversy."⁸

Although Udall sent the letter in a "spirit of humility," the response discouraged him considerably. The two counselors agreed that the matter was of great concern and that the brethren were giving civil rights close, wise, and hopefully inspired attention. They then claimed that the LDS Church could do more for African Americans than any other church but fell back, as their final position, on a public statement by the First Presidency in 1949 and a letter from the same body to Lowry Nelson, famed Mormon sociologist in 1948, that both explained blacks as born into that lineage because of a lack of valiance in the pre-existence. Both documents also reveal a fear that social equality and integration would lead to intermarriage. To Lowry Nelson, the brethren had written: "We are not unmindful of the fact that there is a growing tendency . . . toward breaking down of race barriers in the matter of intermarriage . . . but it does not have the sanction of the Church and is contrary to Church doctrine."⁹ To Udall, Moyle and Brown added, "The fact is that we do not welcome Negroes into social affairs, because if we did, it would lead to intermarriage . . . and we cannot change that until the Lord gives a revelation otherwise." They concluded by saying that the early Church opposed slavery and Joseph Smith proposed compensated emancipation as a solution.

Although discouraged, Udall refused to let the matter rest. He clipped and cataloged the numerous articles in the national press which discussed the policy. As George Romney, Michigan's new Mormon Republican governor, took office, many columnists noted that the Church's policy could destroy him on a national political stage. Udall and his brother, Arizona Congressman Morris K. Udall, exchanged notes when *Newsweek* quoted President Joseph Fielding Smith as saying, "I would not want you to believe that we bear any animosity toward the Negro. 'Darkies' are wonderful peo-

⁸Stewart L. Udall, Letter to Pres. Henry D. Moyle and Hugh B. Brown, 18 September 1961, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection. It is not clear why he did not write to the full presidency unless it was because he had met these men personally.

⁹Qtd. in Presidents Hugh Brown and Henry Moyle, to Stewart L. Udall, 27 September 1961, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection. The question of whether those born into other colored races were also less "valiant" was not at issue since priesthood ordination was denied only to blacks.

ple and they have their place in our church."¹⁰ The younger Udall felt that the current leaders had grown up in a segregated America and a segregated church and did not share Stewart's concern that, as leaders of a Christian church, the Mormon hierarchy should be more inclusive.¹¹

In fact, Stewart Udall wished the Church would take the lead in the area of civil rights. He was greatly disheartened when Ezra Taft Benson published *The Red Carpet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962) theorizing that the civil rights movement was led and controlled by communists. He later repeated this claim in his *An Enemy Hath Done This* (Salt Lake City: Parliament, 1969). Cleon Skousen's *The Naked Communist* (Salt Lake City: Ensign, 1961), which reached similar conclusions, was also very popular among Mormon readers. Udall realized the Church would not move quickly.

In July 1963, Udall again wrote to President Hugh B. Brown, enclosing a newspaper article on Romney and civil rights. (Moyle, on the outs with McKay because of his lavish spending policies, would die in September in Florida.) This time, Brown's response encouraged Udall immensely. President Brown referred to a recent *New York Times* article that concluded the possibility for change was real; this article, said Brown, gives the "overall picture rather fairly." Brown added, the matter is "of very great and, I think, urgent importance to all of us." Then Brown told Udall that the Church might be "going to" Nigeria where a larger group of people had accepted the teachings and needed missionaries. President Brown concluded that letter with a wish that he could meet Udall soon and assured Udall that he was "hoping for Divine guidance in decisions that may be reached."¹²

Three months later, Brown spoke in October general conference giving the most explicit Church position on civil rights to date. After reaffirming the Church's support of the Constitution and that "all men are the children of the same God," Brown called upon all people, "within and outside the church, to commit themselves to the establishment of full civil equality for all of God's children."¹³

¹⁰Quoted in editorial note, Jeff Nye, "Memo from a Mormon," *Look*, 22 October 1963, 74-78.

¹¹Morris K. Udall, Letter to Stewart Udall, 7 May 1963, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection.

¹²Hugh B. Brown, Letter to Stewart Udall, 22 July 1963, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection. See discussion of this article in Lester Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections, 1998," note 4, this issue.

¹³Hugh B. Brown, *Conference Report*, October 1963, Special Collections, Merrill Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah; hereafter cited as Special Collections.

Udall anticipated an announcement, yet nothing official came. During the next few years, the civil rights revolution dramatically accelerated and the strong commitment of Lyndon Johnson's administration often forced Udall into a defensive position. Cabinet colleagues and newspaper reporters chided him over the Church's inaction. Although not very active in the Church, Udall remained Mormon by culture and liberal by temperament. He keenly and strongly felt that the Church's position was morally indefensible. The attacks on the Church's policies in the national press rankled him.

He gathered and studied information from throughout the Church that indicated to him Church members were ready for a change. He preserved a purple-ink hectographed list from the 1950s of scriptural challenges from Lew W. Wallace, a California physician exasperated by the platitude that change could not come without a revelation, a position he found unscriptural. A 14 June 1965 letter from the director and associate director of the "Los Angeles Institute of Religion" called for all students to accept both Brown's statement and Joseph Smith's anti-slavery utterances. They concluded that to do less would be to ignore "the tragic lessons of . . . church history and the basic foundation of . . . religion, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man."¹⁴ A paper written by Armand Mauss, then a member of the sociology faculty at Utah State University on "Mormonism and the Race Attitude" had been presented at the April 1965 Pacific Coast Sociological Association in Salt Lake City. Mauss later delivered a similar paper to a Church Education System gathering. A prepublication copy of an article Dennis Lythgoe, a graduate student at the University of Utah, had written for the *Western Humanities Review*, "Negro Slavery and Mormon Doctrine," agreed with Mauss that the practices of priesthood exclusion derived from an evolutionary policy and did not represent a revealed doctrine. Lythgoe disapprovingly quoted a 1957 talk by Elder Mark E. Petersen that aggressively defended racial segregation.

In 1966, after the eventual passage of civil rights legislation and the voting rights act, Udall decided to publicly challenge the Church to change. Udall drafted a letter, which he sent to Sterling McMurrin and Boyer Jarvis, his old institute associates. McMurrin was now a professor in the University of Utah Department of Philosophy and had been U.S. Commissioner of Education in John F. Kennedy's administration; Boyer Jarvis, McMurrin's assistant as commissioner, was now an administrator at the University of Utah. Udall also sent a draft to his brother Morris, Fawn Brodie, and other

¹⁴George T. Boyd and Howard C. Searle, Letter to students, June 4, 1965, Box 209, fd. 6, Udall Collection.

acquaintances. He entitled his brief essay an "Appeal for Full Fellowship for the Negro."

His cover letter to McMurrin is typical of Stewart Udall. He invited candid criticism and suggestions. "I am most anxious that the final document which goes to print be invulnerable to serious criticism by either scholars or theologians (save Joseph Fielding)."¹⁵ McMurrin's response not only included many editorial suggestions for a lengthier, more exhaustive treatment but also urged Udall to use his government position to publish in national journals like *Harper's* or the *Atlantic Monthly*. Fawn Brodie advised Udall to be realistic and understand that "bigotry is endemic in the Church." She also surmised that if David O. McKay, her uncle, was younger, he might do something, but added, "I know . . . something of his private prejudices and would be astonished to see him abandon them at this late date."¹⁶ After weighing the criticisms and suggestions, Udall decided to follow the advice of Hank Berenstein, a non-Mormon aide, who argued that "the prejudice is harming the Negro as much as it is damning and damaging the Mormon Church" and convinced Udall to address Mormons directly. He appraised *Dialogue*, which had been founded earlier that year, and advised Udall to submit the piece as a letter to the editor.¹⁷ Morris and Stewart discussed the letter and its wording many times; after Stewart concluded to revise and shorten his essay and submit it as a letter, Morris simply warned Stewart that his views would have a greater impact if he were "not a Jack-Mormon."¹⁸

Udall submitted the 1,500-word letter on 24 February 1967. Within the next two weeks, coincidentally, both *Time* and *Newsweek* published articles attacking the Church for its policy and speculating that the policy would seriously damage George Romney's bid for the Republican nomination. On 13 May Eugene England, *Dialogue's* editor, informed Udall that the letter would be in the summer issue, to be mailed on 17 May. Udall's papers contains no prior correspondence with England. The Interior Secretary immediately sent separate copies of his letter to the First Presidency (David O. McKay, N. Eldon Tanner, and Hugh B. Brown), to the two apostles from Arizona (Spencer W. Kimball and Delbert L. Stapley), and to George Rom-

¹⁵Stewart L. Udall, Letter to Sterling McMurrin, 29 November 1966, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection.

¹⁶Fawn M. Brodie, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 4 April 1967, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection.

¹⁷Hank Berenstein, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 20 December 1966, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection.

¹⁸Morris K. Udall, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 6 March 1967, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection.

ney, each with a different cover letter. He concluded his letter to McKay with a sincere assessment: "I want you to personally know that I have expressed myself with humility and utter honesty . . . and always with the prayerful thought that my action, will, in the long run, help, not harm, the church."¹⁹

A few excerpts from his letter establish the tone of his missive. After reviewing the Supreme Court decisions on civil rights and the concepts of equality, Udall moved to the heart of the matter:

We Mormons cannot escape persistent, painful inquiries into the sources and grounds of this belief. Nor can we exculpate ourselves and our Church from justified condemnation by the rationalization that we support the Constitution, believe that all men are brothers, and favor equal rights for all citizens.

This issue must be resolved—and resolved not by pious moralistic platitudes but by clear and explicit pronouncements and decisions that come to grips with the imperious truths of the contemporary world. It must be resolved not because we desire to conform, or because we want to atone for an affront to the whole race. It must be resolved because we are wrong and it is past the time when we should have seen the right. A failure to act here is sure to demean our faith, damage the minds and morals of our youth, and undermine the integrity of our Christian ethic.

Although Udall did not discuss what he viewed as the hypocrisy apparent in the policy, it is a thinly disguised aspect of the letter. He continued by asking his readers to develop empathy:

My fear is that the very character of Mormonism is being distorted and crippled by adherence to a belief and practice that denies the oneness of mankind. We violate the rights and dignity of our Negro brothers, and for this we bear a measure of guilt; but surely we harm ourselves even more.

Then Udall urged his Church leaders to have the courage to change the policy immediately:

Every Mormon knows that his Church teaches that the day will come when the Negro will be given full fellowship. Surely that day has come. All around us the Negro is proving his worth when accepted into the society of free men. All around us are the signs that he needs and must have a genuine brotherhood with Mormons, Catholics, Methodists, and Jews. Surely God is speaking to us now, telling us that the time is here.

"The glory of God is intelligence" has long been a profound Mormon

¹⁹Stewart L. Udall, Letter to David O. McKay, 16 May 1967, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection.

teaching. We must give it new meaning now, for the glory of intelligence is that the wise men and women of each generation dream new dreams and rise to forge broader bonds of human brotherhood. To what more noble accomplishment could we of this generation aspire?²⁰

Udall also released a copy of his letter to the *New York Times* and Associated Press on the day *Dialogue* was mailed. Obviously, Udall wanted press exposure, and he was not disappointed. The extensive national coverage focused on Udall's plea for a change in the Church's policy. The reaction from within the Church was more complex; in addition to those who approved, many disapproved—both that the letter had been written and also that he had released it to the national media so that it could not be treated as an in-house expression in an internal periodical of limited circulation.

The personal response to Udall's letter was immediate and varied. Within a week, he received hundreds of letters, telegrams, and notes. *Dialogue* also received numerous letters; but because the journal is a quarterly, they were not published until the fall issue. In retrospect, Udall was not surprised by the number of responses, but he was amazed at the intensity of the negative responses. He called them "a fascinating cross-section of Mormon thought on the issue."²¹ Most letters are violent but short attacks on Udall that say nothing about the issues he raised. The following samples should be illustrative of the tone.

You absolute NUT! . . . The Carmichael & the Kings and the Muslims—why don't you hit where the enemy lies.

Why don't you transfer to some other faith?

The fact that your parents were Mormans [sic] before you were born does not make you an authority on running the affairs of the Church of Jesus Christ.

I feel that you are not even worthy of the government position you hold when you use *your* church for your own benefit.

Who made you so omnipotent that you feel you can solve a problem. Abel could not solve nor Adam nor Lincoln or Eisenhower . . . or who do you think you are to presume you can force . . . David O. McKay to open up the windows of security on the Negroes?

If apostates like you would keep their mouths shut, there would not be

²⁰Udall, Letter to the editor, 5-7.

²¹Stewart L. Udall, Notes, 1 January 1968, Box 209, fd. 5, Udall Collection.

any reproach brought upon the church in the minds of the uninformed or ill-informed public.

It seems to me that you have one foot in the church, one in your governmental job and an extra foot in your mouth.²²

Five Democratic families who claimed to be sixth- and seventh-generation Church members and Democrats sent a telegram demanding, "Why are you trying to get the priesthood for other people when you value it so lightly[?]"²³ An Arizona woman warned, "You know what happened to Lucifer when he told God how to run affairs. . . . Don't make a fool of yourself for your worthy ancestors sake."²⁴

Many of the Mormon respondents, obviously seeing Udall as having gone theologically astray, bore their testimonies. A large group saw Udall as politically motivated to derail Romney's candidacy. Two Yale medical students denounced the letter as "an unethical attempt to embarrass Governor George Romney."²⁵

In contrast, Udall was heartened by Church members who expressed support. Esther Peterson wrote: "Just read your *Dialogue* letter—Splendid! Congratulations." Lowry Nelson added, "I'm proud of you. . . . Would that a little of your courage could get piped into the . . . headquarters." Wayne M. Carle, a former bishop and the Assistant Superintendent of Ohio Schools wrote: "Your letter says so well what many of us believe so deeply. It is encouraging indeed to have such a statement from a person in high office, and to have it put in such eloquent words. I hope it is read and understood at 47 East South Temple." Cousin John Udall at the UCLA Medical school stated, "You are dead right—most of all we harm ourselves by continuing to maintain a posture of superiority."²⁶

Especially revealing of the relief expressed by many liberal, educated Mormons who had long been troubled by the priesthood denial policy were

²²Letters to Stewart L. Udall from: Anonymous, 20 May 1967; W. A. Bernheim, 20 May 1967; Don C. Horne, 20 May 1967; Carl R. Dearden, 19 May 1967; Gerald T. Judd, 20 May 1967; Alfred M. Knight, 22 May 1967; James Williams, 29 May 1967, Box 209, fd. 5, Udall Collection.

²³Barkers, Hornes, Driggs, Rices, Christensens, 19 May 1967, Box 209, fd. 5, Udall Collection.

²⁴Mrs. H. C. Brown, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 19 May 1967, Box 209, fd. 5, Udall Collection.

²⁵Romney Burke and James Ogilvie, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 21 May 1967, Box 209, fd. 5, Udall Collection.

²⁶Letters from: Esther Peterson, 19 May 1967; Lowry Nelson, 21 May 1967; Wayne M. Carle, 13 June 1967; John A. Udall, 21 May 1967, Box 209, fd. 4, Udall Collection.

these letters: W. Grant Ivins, a former BYU professor, wrote: "Let me congratulate you. This is a courageous statement of sentiment shared by thousands of Church members. For one of your stature to take the lead in this long overdue movement for change is most heartening." Boyd Mathias, a law professor at the University of Pacific hoped "that this doctrine is changed before too many people have to pay the price of self-deception in order to be Mormons in the Twentieth Century."²⁷ Both letters confirm a pattern apparent among the mail Stewart Udall received. Most professionals, especially those in education, were inclined to praise him. The authors of negative letters seem to be non-professional Church members who wrote in long hand and did not use official letterhead.

There was no response from any of the members of the First Presidency; however, Stapley and Kimball both wrote within the week. It is possible that they were instructed to respond, but they chose very different styles. Stapley wrote a four-page single-spaced letter labeled "personal and confidential." He asked specifically that the Interior Secretary not release any of it to the press and stated, "I know I can trust you with the contents." The letter is a theological defense of racism as well as personal rebuke for releasing the article for "national consumption." Stapley saw the article as "a stumbling block to George Romney" or any other Mormon who might seek national office." He reminded Udall that, in the Church, "instruction and guidance come down from above and not from below." After reviewing the history of how the Lord "selects" a chosen people, Stapley reiterated that "God himself placed the curse . . . and it is up to him and not to man to lift that curse." Stapley concluded by saying his letter did not require an answer and he "appreciated" his friendship "with you and the Udall families for whom I have great love and respect."²⁸

Spencer Kimball's letter, sent a day earlier, took the tone of an upset and disappointed father. Obviously, the eastern Arizona connection between the Udalls and the Kimballs was long and personal. After some introductory comments, Kimball began at the third paragraph: "Stewart, I cannot believe it! You wouldn't presume to command your God nor to make a demand of a Prophet of God!" After examining what he considered Udall's possible motives, Kimball concluded: "It was the result of a sincere but ill-advised effort in behalf of the welfare of a minority." Kimball expressed his pride in Udall's accomplishments and prominence but contin-

²⁷H. Grant Ivins, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 23 May 1967; O. Boyd Mathias, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 5 June 1967, Box 209, fd. 4, Udall Collection.

²⁸Delbert L. Stapley, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 26 May 1967, Box 209, fd. 5, Udall Collection.

ued the lecture: "My dear Stewart, neither your eminence in secular matters nor your prominence in government circles has justified you in any such monumental presumption." He warned Udall not to clothe such a serious matter in "ragged, human apparel," explained that his own response was motivated by a desire for Udall's good because he felt sorry for him, said he felt no anger toward him, signed the letter with "sincere kind wishes," and then underlined the three words.²⁹ Kimball's response is significant in that he did not defend the policy but asked Udall to respect the manner in which change comes to the Church. He reminded the Secretary of the Interior that members were presumptuous to assume that anyone but God and the prophet could alter the bestowal of the priesthood.

The next two issues of *Dialogue* also carried a number of letters relative to Stewart Udall's letter. Obviously, they varied in tone but were often much longer and responded to the specific issues Udall raised. Those opposed to his view often took the position of Vernon Romney, later Utah's attorney general, who queried, "By virtue of what Church standing does Udall presume to lecture the brethren on their doctrine?" Paul Richards, later BYU spokesman under three university presidents, added, "Mr. Udall must think the church is made up of extremely gullible people. Otherwise he never would have set himself up as he did to try to influence the members."³⁰ One of the most interesting letters chastised Udall for being moralistic and naive but also conceded that the Church would be in an anthropological dilemma if it started to define who was and was not Negro. Gary Lobb wrote from Brazil about the reality of blacks holding the priesthood there because of a totally different view of ethnicity and race. He also raised the question of why Fiji men could be ordained while the Papuans of New Guinea could not.³¹

Udall admits to being stung by some of the letters but, uncharacteristically, chose not to reply to any of the personal notes or letters, whether positive or negative, including those of the apostles. He was trying to keep Lyndon Johnson, beleaguered by the Vietnam War, somewhat focused on national parks, seashores, monuments, and a constructive new policy on Native Americans. Udall wanted to create an open discussion and make Church leaders aware that many active believers did not accept this cen-

²⁹Spencer W. Kimball, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 25 May 1967, Box 29, fd. 5, Udall Collection.

³⁰Vernon Romney and Paul Richards, Letters to the editor, *Dialogue* 2 (Fall 1967): 5-6.

³¹Gary Lobb, Letter to the editor, *ibid.*, 7-8.

tury-old practice of discrimination. He publicly opened the debate but then stepped back to see where it led.

Udall confided his pleasure a month later when President Hugh B. Brown, addressing the annual June Youth Conference, told Mormon teens and their leaders: "We must dethrone our prejudices, cancel our conceit and with humility continue the quest which will involve new appraisals of values." Brown added: "Change, which alone is permanent, calls for reviewing of past decisions and bases upon which they are founded." He defined "the dignity of man" as the "essence of democracy. . . . Our democracy presupposes the right of every minority[,] even of only one person, to differ with the opinions of the majority."³²

It would be presumptuous to assume that one letter to the editor precipitated a revelation eleven years later, but it is one of many significant events that created discussion, research, and thought. With tempered hope, George S. Ballif, a Provo lawyer, wrote Udall: "We are not too sanguine that the 'revelation' ending the long standing discrimination will result directly from what you said." A highly respected scholar of Mormon history George Ellsworth confided his belief: "There is no development in Mormonism quite so inharmonious with the fundamental doctrines . . . than the position that has developed through the years with regard to the Negro." Ellsworth lamented the little disposition manifest among the General Authorities to change the policy. "How shall we best work on it?" he asked.³³

The social unrest of the period kept the issue in the forefront for many years. Wherever the athletic teams from Brigham Young University ventured from Wyoming to Colorado or Stanford, demonstrations protested the policy. Many black athletes refused to play against the Church-owned school. In 1969, Church leaders issued another statement affirming full support of civil rights legislation but left the expansion of priesthood blessings "in the hands of the Lord."³⁴ Mormon scholars continued to publish serious examinations that challenged the nineteenth century's origins and speculated as to how the ban came into being.³⁵

³²"Mormon Leaders Support Civil Rights," *Arizona Republic*, 24 June 1967.

³³George S. Ballif, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 1 June 1967, Box 209, fd. 4, Udall Collection; S. George Ellsworth, Letter to Stewart L. Udall, 17 October 1967, Box 209, fd. 5, Udall Collection.

³⁴First Presidency Statement, *Church News*, 16 December 1969.

³⁵For an excellent review of the literature, see the bibliography in Lester E. Bush Jr. and Armand L. Mauss, eds., *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church* (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1984), 227-30, including Bush's own magisterial "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue* 8 (Spring 1973): 11-68. See his "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro

In the meantime, the Church appointed committees to study the policy, sent missionaries to Nigeria, organized the all-black Genesis group in the Salt Lake Valley, and constantly reexamined attitudes among the membership. Still many Church leaders continued to defend the practice, relying on interpretations of the Old Testament, the Book of Abraham, and Brigham Young's speeches to justify the restrictions. However, an evolution of thinking and questioning pervaded the Church at all levels, including the very highest. Some scholars have speculated that Church leaders periodically prayed about the ban and requested guidance. Eleven years after chastising Stewart Udall for publishing his letter, President Spencer W. Kimball announced that the Lord had spoken and the priesthood could be conferred upon all worthy male members regardless of skin color (D&C Official Declaration-2).

By 1978, Stewart Udall, age fifty-eight, was back in Arizona practicing law, championing environmental issues, and leading the charge of Navajo uranium mine and mill workers in a legal battle with the federal government. When he heard of the revelation, he was thrilled that the change had come and that Spencer W. Kimball had announced it. Later Udall said, "I consider President Kimball the most inspired Mormon president of this century and he did the right thing."³⁶

It is intriguing to attempt to assess Udall's motivation for writing his 1967 letter. Is Udall's liberal social conscience rooted in his Mormonism or a challenge to it? Is there genuine continuity in all of his activities, or did the unusual doctrinal question of blacks and the priesthood stand out? If so, did it educate his sensibility and prompt his empathy toward Native Americans, Hispanics, and uranium mine and mill workers?

In searching for these answers, it is necessary to return to the memo Udall wrote in 1947, outlining his fundamental disagreements with his church. Udall firmly believed that theological and historical Mormonism were incompatible with post-World War II political conservatism. Among his points were many that discussed the Church's historical role among the poor, the oppressed, the disadvantaged, and the working class. In his world view, Mormonism needed to recapture a moral position that would put it on the leading edge in a 1960s world where activism and questioning generated "creative tension." He certainly succeeded in this instance. Recalling this incident, Udall still remembers as perhaps his most important personal

Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973); Context and Reflections, 1998," this issue, for a record of his experiences.

³⁶Stewart L. Udall, interviewed by F. Ross Peterson, 24 April 1997, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

statement his final sentence in his letter to President David O. McKay, "I have expressed myself with humility and utter honesty . . . and always with the prayerful thought that my action, will, in the long run, help, not harm, the church."³⁷

³⁷Stewart L. Udall, Letter to David O. McKay, 16 May 1967, Box 209, fd. 3, Udall Collection.